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## CLICKY AESTHETICS: DELEUZE, HEADPHONICS, AND THE MINIMALIST ASSEMBLAGE OF "ABERRATIONS"

NONPOLITICS CLICKS & CUTS, DIGITAL, GLITCH, MILLE PLATEAUX

It seems fitting, then, that with the "speed" and proliferation of music, artists, and new labels, as well as a "do-it-yourself" mode of production enabled by the new technologies, and the lack of an adequate rhetoric to explain, describe, and theorize the new developments in the music, that *Mille Plateaux* would celebrate its one hundredth release by initiating a book project to fill the gap. In an essay outlining the project, one worth tarrying on here, Szepanski writes:

Today, music is information and can be digitalized in the form of binary coding. In every form, it is connotated with computer systems, implemented into the "age of technology", and can be described with a "techno-aesthetic concept to which electronic media is everything but external. It is media-music, independent from whether media are discussed as being constructivistic, being medially technical dispositives, a distorted atopic space for transmissions or not.<sup>1</sup>

This notion of music as "information" can be seen in the individual producer's writing/production of "patches," sound passages that form the material of the composition and that are sometimes shared among producers. Szepanski continues:

It is surprising that, besides the explication of mediality of significant and the large number of discourses concerning the medial ways of visibility, the musical field most often is not mentioned within the media discourse. If, in the sector of the visual, illustration and interpretation of reality increasingly are left behind a visualization of pure visibility, least of the media concepts realize the musical information packages and their medial constructions which, in their ecstatic growth, do not (re)present reality but only themselves.<sup>2</sup>

And so the strategy for articulating a discourse of experimental electronic music in media theory is called for in this announcement, a movement from the visual production to the aural one, the "under-represented" by virtue of being "non-representational." Music is a "language" of sound, but one that communicates in "multiplicities." It cannot be reduced to "communication," but it "communicates," an aural stimulus driven by the agitation of rhythm, the spatiality of tone. "Music does not function as a carrier of messages but offers nothing but empty signification and resists any attempt for decoding. So it more or less allows any form of interpretation. Its only content is that of its own sound and the sound of a reality existing outside."<sup>3</sup> Yet, mediation occurs between hardware—the Powerbook; the software program-MAX/MSP, SuperCollider, Reaktor, C Sound; and the patch designer or programmer—for example, Akira Rabelais, producer and author of sound programs like *Argeiphontes Lyre*. The media is the binary code, punctuated, microtonal clicks, or glitches used for syncopated effects as well as rhythmic refrains.

Szepanski insists, though, that electronic music is not simply a part of media theory; electronic music interrogates it—through the "mutual attacks of heterogeneous forms," as

Deleuze referred to it. Music is part of an information technology that does not "generate its forms out of itself but out of elements of all systems." Szepanski notes, "music has stopped being a mathematical science of intervals....Electronic synthesis instruments sound in the in-between of the intervals and analogue media store the real infinitely variable, independent from the dictate of notation and the imperativism of analogue instruments." The result is that the digital machine "cover[s] up meaning, disrupt[s] sense, delete[s] historical markings and traces." Clicks and cuts are the "interval" that exceeds all intervals in the musical scales, the "in-between" of the in-between. The on-and-off logic of the binary code, the click and cut, can only "develop as the context of an event, e.g. a musical event, a consistent coupling with musical forms like Clickhouse, Clicktechno, R & B Click, Glitchfunk, Neuronenhouse, etc." The click and cut are thus the aural equivalent of an amplification of a mouseclick made by a musician that creates an agitation of the nervous system and a sound commensurate to the breach of connectivity; "every track is more a temporary interruption of the ability to be connected rather than fixedly regular work." Therefore, "clicks do not express meanings or essences but only intensity and connections" as well as disconnections.<sup>4</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, these are the "unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous" forces that must be harnessed from the deterritorialized, molecular outside of the Cosmos.<sup>5</sup> Writing at an earlier time when the digital had a long way to go before superseding the analogue, Deleuze and Guattari anticipated the aesthetics of microsound:

The synthesizer has taken the place of the old "a priori synthetic judgment," and all functions change accordingly. By placing all its components in continuous variation, music itself becomes a superlinear system, a rhizome instead of a tree, and enters the service of a virtual cosmic continuum of which even holes, silences, ruptures, and breaks are a part.<sup>6</sup>

However, if we are to carefully follow their suggestion about the continuous variation of synthesized sound, we must not make the mistake of reterritorializing the new movement in sound as the "becoming" of microsound but rather perhaps the "becoming-microsound" of synthesized sound in general. Deleuze and Guattari continue:

By assembling modules, source elements, and elements for treating sound (oscillators, generators, and transformers), by arranging microintervals, the synthesizer makes audible the sound process itself, the production of that process, and puts us in contact with still other elements beyond sound matter.<sup>7</sup>

## II. The Enunciation

The "superlinear, rhizomatic system" that Deleuze and Guattari had in mind regarding the synthesizer could not possibly have foreseen the extreme variations of aural experience found in the work of Ryoji Ikeda, both a contemporary and important influence for many microsound musicians and producers. As with a number of musicians that work with sine waves, Ikeda's music not only changes with repeated listens but also within each individual aural experience through varying one's position of the head and location in the room. The sine wave belongs with clicks, hisses, pops, and other onomatopoeic descriptors to the aberrant types of sound that find their currency in the present milieu of experimental electronic music. In the case of a sine wave musician such as Sachiko Matsubara, who employs a sampler divested of all preprogrammed sounds exclusive of the sine waves conventionally used for tuning, a novel reconception of an otherwise unutilized and anathematized sound parallels the *Mille Plateaux*' recuperation of the click.

<sup>1</sup>Achim Szepanski. "Digital Music and Media Theory." 30 Nov. 2000. 20 Oct. 2001 <<http://www.force-inc.net/theory/index.html>>; .

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota

P, 1987. 343.

6 Ibid. 95.

7 Ibid. 343.

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